Indiana State
Department of Health
Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Yellow Fever

What is yellow fever?

Yellow fever is a disease caused by a virus that is spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito. Yellow fever virus is found in tropical and subtropical areas in South America and Africa. Yellow fever virus is a very rare cause of illness in U.S. travelers to these areas.

What are the symptoms of yellow fever?

Initial symptoms of yellow fever include sudden onset of:
- fever
- chills
- severe headache
- back pain
- general body aches
- nausea and vomiting
- fatigue and weakness

Most people improve after these initial symptoms. However, roughly 15% of people will have a brief period of hours to a day without symptoms and will then develop a more severe form of yellow fever disease. In severe cases, a person may develop high fever, jaundice (a condition that involves yellow discoloration of the skin and the whites of the eyes), bleeding (especially from the gastrointestinal tract), and eventually shock and failure of many organs. Roughly 20-50% of people who develop severe illness may die.

How is yellow fever spread?

Yellow fever virus is transmitted to people primarily through the bite of infected *Aedes* or *Haemagogus* species mosquitoes. Yellow fever is not spread directly from person to person.

Who is at risk for yellow fever?

People who travel or live in areas where the vector mosquitoes live are at risk for catching yellow fever. This includes some tropical, savannah, and urban areas of the world.

How is yellow fever treated?

No specific treatments have been found to benefit patients with yellow fever, so most treatment is symptomatic. Rest, fluids, and use of pain relievers and medication to reduce fever *that do not contain aspirin or other NSAIDs* may relieve symptoms of aching and fever. Yellow fever patients should be protected from further mosquito exposure (staying indoors and/or under a mosquito net) for up to 5 days after the onset of fever. This way, yellow fever virus in their bloodstream will be unavailable to uninfected mosquitoes, thus breaking the transmission cycle and reducing risk to the persons around them.

How is yellow fever prevented?

The best way to avoid getting yellow fever is to receive yellow fever vaccine prior to travel to affected areas. Avoiding mosquito bites is also an effective way to prevent yellow fever. More information about whether yellow fever is a concern at your travel destination can be found on CDC's Travel website. Talk to your healthcare provider or visit a travel clinic near you for more information.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: http://www.cdc.gov/yellowfever/index.html

This page was last reviewed July 1, 2016.